

IPSO Report 2020

Highland News & Media

Covering January 1 to December 31, 2020

Produced by John Davidson, Content & Commercial Editor

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Overview of HNM

Highland News and Media Limited (HNM) was established in December 2019. The company was previously operated as Scottish Provincial Press (SPP).

HNM is a privately-owned company producing 18 weekly newspapers covering Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Strathspey, Moray, Banffshire and Aberdeenshire. All titles are printed at the DC Thomson's print centre in Dundee.

Up until 2017, SPP had editorial and advertising offices in Wick, Thurso, Golspie, Dingwall, Inverness, Grantown-on-Spey, Kingussie, Forres, Elgin, Banff, Keith, Huntly and Buckie.

In 2017 we closed many of the smaller offices to concentrate operations in three main centres, Inverness, Wick and Elgin. We now have an office in Turriff following the acquisition of the Advertiser series - Ellon, Turriff and Inverurie.

We employ around 80 people across the remaining sites in the Highlands, Moray and Aberdeenshire, with some now working from home.

As well as the paid for titles, these people also produce a number of associated newspaper websites, classified websites, special publications and armed forces publications. The pandemic has affected the market particularly for the special publications but we hope to regain some of this work in the future.

Our editorial structure has changed during the pandemic, as we no longer have a managing editor or editorial director. Instead, we have a number of senior content reporters who are

responsible for dealing with complaints with support from colleagues at the same level across the business where necessary.

List of products/titles

Inverness Courier (Tuesday & Friday editions)
Highland News
Caithness Courier
John O’Groat Journal
Northern Times
Ross-shire Journal
North Star
Strathspey and Badenoch Herald
Forres Gazette
Northern Scot
Banffshire Journal
Banffshire Advertiser
Banffshire Herald
Huntly Express
Ellon Advertiser
Inverurie Advertiser
Turriff Advertiser

In addition we publish a monthly business magazine, Executive, which is free.

We also publish the following associated websites:

<https://www.inverness-courier.co.uk/>
<https://www.ross-shirejournal.co.uk/>
<https://www.northern-times.co.uk/>
<https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/>
<https://www.strathspey-herald.co.uk/>
<https://www.forres-gazette.co.uk/>
<https://www.northern-scot.co.uk/>
<https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/>

Responsible Person

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Code of Conduct

All of our journalists are issued with a code of conduct when they join and their contracts make it clear that they are expected to act within its guidelines. The sub editors and the content editors are also trained to spot any stories that fall below those standards as a further check level.

The editors are instructed to initially discuss with their senior colleagues if they are in any doubt about a story and, if there is still concern, a decision would be taken at that stage whether it would be necessary to run that past an IPSO officer.

All of our journalists understand the need to have stories independently verified. All updates to the code are communicated directly to all the relevant staff as soon as possible after they are announced, as are any guidelines.

Training

Most of our editorial staff have undertaken the introductory IPSO code of conduct training.

There have also been some ad hoc training sessions through the NUJ on specific topics such as defamation, which one or two of our staff have attended over the last year.

We would be interested in further training for more of our editorial staff on the code and understand some of this will be available online in the future, which might suit us due to our geographical location.

Complaints handling

All of our titles carry a panel explaining our complaints procedure and stating that if a complaint is not resolved it will be referred to IPSO. We also include web links to the code and IPSO and IPSO's telephone number. All websites also have a "How to complain" tab at the bottom of the home page containing the same information.

All of our publications, in print and online, carry the IPSO logo.

With the change of editorial staffing structure, we have recently updated our internal complaints procedure:

Complaints protocol – updated January 2021

Our aim should obviously be to never let our behaviour or standards fall to a point where our professionalism or quality of work is brought into question. However, complaints are an inevitable part of our job so we need to adopt a consistent way of dealing with them.

A large number of complaints are down to a lack of understanding on the public's part – eg they don't realise that we have a legal right to publish details of a court case – or because

they don't like a story. Not liking a story doesn't render it incorrect, unethical or unlawful, but we need to hear the complainant out.

Thankfully, legal complaints are rare, so most of the time the goal is simply to prevent the complaint escalating and reaching IPSO. It is therefore important to ascertain from the outset what the complainant wants.

If they have a legitimate reason to complain, sometimes a right to reply (in the form of a letter or a follow-up story) is enough to satisfy them.

Step-by-step guide:

- If the complaint has come in via email, a response should be sent within one working day of it being received, even if it is just a holding note, to explain that we are looking into the matter. If a complainant telephones and the issue can't be dealt with immediately, just inform them we will get back to them as soon as we have looked into it.
- Log the complaint on the complaints spreadsheet.
- Content editors should investigate the complaint or delegate the matter to a suitably experienced colleague. Amanda Bourn or John Davidson can be contacted for legal or IPSO advice.
- If the complainant will not accept your decision or offer of amends then the complaint can be reviewed by an equally senior colleague.
- The complainant should be informed that the matter has been passed to another senior manager who is now looking into the matter.
- If the company is satisfied the complaint has been handled fairly and properly but there is still no resolution, the complainant will be informed that their next step is to refer the matter to IPSO.

ENDS

The above complaints procedure has been distributed to senior editorial colleagues.

IPSO complaints

HNM has had no complaints upheld by IPSO in the period this report covers.